

Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission FY-99 Overview

Introduction

“We, the Indians of the Pacific Northwest, recognize that our fisheries are a basic and important natural resource and of vital concern to the Indians of this state, and that the conservation of this natural resource is dependent upon effective and progressive management. We further believe that by unity of action, we can best accomplish these things, not only for the benefit of our own people but for all of the people of the Pacific Northwest.”

– Preamble to the Constitution of the
Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission

The Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission was created in 1974 by the treaty Indian tribes in western Washington as a result of the *U.S. v. Washington* litigation that affirmed fishing rights reserved by the tribes in treaties signed with the federal government in the 1850s.

The commission's role is to assist the tribes in conducting biologically-sound fisheries and to provide member tribes with a single, unified voice on fisheries management and conservation issues. Member tribes are Nisqually, Squaxin Island, Puyallup, Jamestown S’Klallam, Port Gamble S’Klallam, Lower Elwha Klallam, Skokomish, Swinomish, Sauk-Suiattle, Upper Skagit, Tulalip, Makah, Stillaguamish, Muckleshoot, Suquamish, Nooksack, Lummi, Quinault and Quileute.

The tribes select commissioners who develop policy and provide direction to NWIFC staff. The commissioners elect a chairman, vice chairman and treasurer. The commission's executive director supervises the staff that implements the policies and fisheries management activities approved by the commissioners. The NWIFC employs about 60 full-



NWIFC pathologist Bruce Stewart, center, provides fish health training for tribal hatchery personnel.

time employees in its Administration, Fishery Services, Habitat Services, and Information and Education Services divisions.

The Administration Division includes the executive director, human resources and operations administrator, director of fishery services, fishery and legislative policy analysts, and clerical and accounting departments.

The Fishery Services Division supports and promotes the fishery programs of member tribes by providing technical assistance, coordinating management programs and representing tribal management policies. The program is comprised of the Fishery Management and Planning Division, Quantitative Services Division and Enhancement Services Division, and provides services ranging from harvest management planning to database management and fish health.

The Habitat Services Division provides coordination, representation and technical and policy assistance to member tribes on fish habitat and other environmental issues. In addition, the program coordinates tribal participation in forest management processes and conducts a statewide Coordinated Tribal Water Quality Program, among other programs.

The Information and Education Division provides comprehensive public relations services to member tribes. The division produces news releases, publications and videos, works with the media, coordinates and provides public presentations, develops and staffs educational exhibits at fairs and other events, and responds to numerous information requests from agencies, organizations and the public, among other activities.

FY-99 Overview

The Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission greeted two major events in 1999. One was the 25th anniversary of *U.S. v. Washington* – the Boldt Decision – which reaffirmed the tribal right to harvest salmon and established the tribes as co-managers of the resource. It was a time for celebration and reflection on what tribes have accomplished in responsible natural resource management.

The other major event was greeted much more somberly – the March listing by the National Marine Fisheries Service of Puget Sound chinook and two other western Washington stocks as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Tribes are optimistic ESA might finally crack down on habitat-destroying land use practices, but also fear that traditional fisheries might be further reduced and that fishing will continue to shoulder an unfair burden in salmon recovery. The listings confirmed that depleted salmon stocks in the Pacific Northwest cannot be recovered by commercial fishing cutbacks alone. The tribes have cut back harvests by 80 percent in the last decade, yet salmon numbers continue to decline because of loss and degradation of suitable spawning and rearing habitat.

The tribes and NWIFC responded to the ESA listings by intensifying their already extensive watershed recovery efforts, with the state/tribal Wild Stock Restoration Initiative (WSRI) as the driver. The aim of the effort is to inventory the state’s salmon stocks and habitat, then develop goals, objectives and guidelines to restore the most critical stocks and habitats. Key elements in WSRI – the Salmon And Steelhead Habitat Inventory and Assessment Project (SSHAP) and innovative comprehensive species planning processes – progressed in 1999.

Tribal comprehensive species planning recognizes that the management of habitat, harvest and hatcheries cannot be addressed in isolation. For example, harvest management has responded – and must continue to respond – to wild stock declines. However, when long-term problems are rooted primarily in habitat degradation, rather than over fishing, further restrictions in fisheries won’t restore depressed stocks to their full productive potential. The answer lies in a comprehensive approach of addressing all impacts to weak stocks, including protecting productive habitat and restoring degraded habitat.

Regional or watershed initiatives are at the heart of improved tribal comprehensive species planning. Tribes continued to help develop specific recovery plans for each watershed in 1999, and these plans will guide how fisheries, habitat and hatcheries will be managed.

Improved planning processes like Comprehensive Coho and Comprehensive Puget Sound Chinook seek to protect and restore adequate freshwater habitat and to ensure enough spawning adult salmon escape to use it. The goal is to restore the abundance, productivity and diversity of salmon stocks originating in Puget Sound and the Washington coast to levels that can sustain treaty and non-treaty fisheries.

Prior to the mid-1990s, harvest management planning in Puget Sound was generally focused on harvest of hatchery stocks and achieving wild fish escapement goals (the number of fish needed to spawn and perpetuate the run). Comprehensive chinook and coho management plans are designed to change the way salmon are managed by moving away from the fixed escapement target and toward harvesting a percentage of the overall run, known as an exploitation rate, in concert with freshwater habitat improvements and firm hatchery guidelines.

The NWIFC and a number of treaty tribes worked with Governor Gary Locke, the Washington State Legislature, federal and state fisheries and environmental agencies, county governments, and private forest landowners to produce the Forests and Fish Report, which sets tougher goals for water and fish protection. Developed over a two-year period, this ground-breaking report was approved by the Washington State Legislature in May. It is intended to be a long-term protection plan, which guides the management of private forest lands for the next 50 years and beyond. However, implementation of the report will require continued work by the tribes to bring it into being.

The NWIFC is also optimistic about the tribal working relationship with the state co-managers after the hiring of new Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Director Jeff Koenings. Cooperation and understanding improved in 1999 after several years of rancor between the state and tribes over such issues as unilateral decision-making by the department on mass marking and selective fisheries. The NWIFC in 1999 continued to dedicate time and effort to educate the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission and the agency's director about co-management and the tribal perspective on important fisheries management issues.

Another promising development in 1999 was the signing of the Pacific Salmon Treaty in June between the U.S., Canada, states of Washington, Oregon and Alaska, and tribes. The new 10-year deal, the first since the two countries failed to reach an annual agreement in 1997, aims to put conservation first. To that end, the deal established a \$140 million U.S. fund to protect and rebuild salmon spawning grounds. There is also a redistribution of quotas. The U.S. percentage of the valuable Fraser River sockeye will eventually be reduced, while Canada agreed to a reduction in harvest on weaker stocks of chinook and coho, allowing more of those fish to return to Washington and Oregon rivers.

The NWIFC continued to work hard to secure funding for the tribes' fishery management and habitat programs. Examples include acquiring funding for the SSHIAP project and obtaining additional money for habitat conservation planning coordination. The commission is also on track to receive money for ESA and salmon recovery activities for the tribes. It is anticipated that much effort will be undertaken in FY-00 to secure necessary funding for tribal staff infrastructure, planning and assessment projects, and monitoring.

FY-99 Activities Summary

Following is a synopsis of activities by the NWIFC during FY-99:

Fishery Services

Fishery Management And Planning Division

The primary objective of the Fishery Management and Planning Division is to provide technical assistance and

coordination to member tribes in their annual and long-range fishery management planning activities.

In FY-99, activities included:

- Long range planning/Wild Stock Restoration Initiative implementation;
- Development of pre-season fishing agreements;
- Development of pre-season and in-season run size forecasts;
- In-season fisheries monitoring; and
- Post-season fishery analysis and reporting.

Quantitative Services Division

The Quantitative Services Division's objective is to assist tribal fishery management programs by providing relevant data, quantitative tools and analyses, and technical consulting services to tribal and NWIFC projects.

Activities for FY-99 included:

- Administering and coordinating the Treaty Indian Catch Monitoring Program. The program provides an agreed upon harvest database that can provide hard catch statistics critical for fisheries management planning and allocation;
- Providing statistical consulting services for pre-season abundance forecasts and in-season run size update models;
- Conducting data analysis of fisheries studies and developing study designs; and
- Updating and evaluating fishery management statistical models and databases.

Enhancement Services Division

The Enhancement Services Division provides tribal support services in enhancement planning, hatchery coordination, coded wire tagging, and fish health.

Activities included:

- Coded wire tagging of 3.3 million fish at tribal hatcheries to provide information critical to fisheries management;
- Fulfilling tribal requests for coded wire tag analysis; and

- Providing fish health services to tribal hatcheries in the areas of juvenile fish health monitoring, disease diagnostics, adult health inspection and vaccine production.

U.S./Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty Implementation

The Pacific Salmon Treaty of 1985 provides for tribal representation at all levels of the Pacific Salmon Commission, which implements the treaty. NWIFC staff are involved in many aspects of the treaty's implementation.

Activities included:

- Facilitating inter-tribal and inter-agency meetings, developing issue papers and negotiation options;
- Informing tribes and policy representatives on issues affected by the treaty implementation process;
- Serving on the Fraser sockeye and pink, chum, coho, chinook, and data sharing technical committees, as well as other work groups and panels; and
- Coordinating tribal research and data gathering activities associated with implementation of the Pacific Salmon Treaty.

Habitat Services Division

The Habitat Services Division provides coordination, representation and technical assistance to member tribes on fish habitat and other environmental issues. The division monitors these issues and acts as an information clearinghouse.

Activities in FY-99 included:

- Coordinating policy and technical level discussion between tribes and federal, state and local governments, and other interested parties;

- Coordinating, representing and monitoring tribal interests in the Timber/Fish/Wildlife process, Coordinated Tribal Water Quality and Ambient Monitoring programs;
- Monitoring, analyzing and distributing technical information on habitat-related forums, programs and processes; and
- Implementing the Salmon and Steelhead Habitat Inventory and Assessment Project.

Information And Education Services Division

The Information and Education Services Division provides comprehensive public relations and educational service to member tribes.

Activities in FY-99 included:

- Producing news releases, newsletters, brochures, reports, curricula, videos, photographs, exhibits and maintaining a web site to educate the public about tribal natural resource management activities and objectives;
- Producing newsletters, background papers and other materials to help keep member tribes informed on topics of interest;
- Responding to hundreds of public requests for information on the tribes and tribal natural resource management activities; and
- Monitoring legislation and coordinating tribal input.

For More Information

For more information about the natural resource management activities of the treaty Indian tribes in western Washington, contact the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, 6730 Martin Way E., Olympia, WA 98516; or call (360) 438-1180. Visit the NWIFC home page at www.nwifc.wa.gov.